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The Duty of Christians to live together in
Religious-Communion, Recommended.

IN A
SERMON
Preached at *Belfast*, *January 5th. 1724-5*
Before the
SUB-SYNOD.

On *Rom. xv. 7.*

By *MICHAEL BRUCE.*



B E L F A S T :

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The Duty of Christians to live together in
Fellowship - Communion, Reconciliation.

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MEMORIAL

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Rom. XV. 7.

Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the Glory of God.



OUR present unhappy divided State (which is so Publickly known, that it were a Folly to attempt to palliate or conceal it) justifies my Choice of the Text I have read, as a proper Subject for the Entertainment of this Audience ; for it teacheth us our present Duty, and recommends it to our Practice, by a very powerful Argument.

THAT we may consider it with the greater Advantage, let us call to Mind the Circumstances the Church at *Rome* was in, when this Epistle was written to them : It was made up partly of *Jewish*, and partly of *Gentile* Christians, that is, some of them before their Conversion to the Christian Faith, had been *Jews*, and some had been *Gentiles* or *Heathens* : The *Jewish* Christians still retain'd a great Reverence and Zeal for the Ceremonial Law, in which they had been educated ; which made them not only nice and scrupulous as to their own Practice, with Respect to several Matters, such as the Use of several Meats, and the Observation of certain Days ; but likewise apt to be censorious, and uncharitable to others, who

had not the same Scruples, with Respect to these Matters : The *Gentile* Christians, as they had not been bred up to the Observation of those Ceremonies, so neither had they been taught them as any part of the Christian Law, by those who converted them to the Christian Religion ; and therefore used their Liberty, without those Restrictions, which the *Jewish* Christians laid on themselves, not without some Contempt of them for their Scruples. This appears evidently, from the preceding Chapter and this, to have been the State of this Church.

THESE different Sentiments, and Practises (considering the Corruptions of Men) laid a Foundation for Contention and Divisions among them, and were ready to break out into a Flame ; to prevent which, the Apostle, in the two Chapters already named, gives necessary Instructions to both Parties how to carry to each other ; enforces them with the strongest Argument ; adds his earnest Prayer to God for their Peace and Unity ; and then gives them the Exhortation which we have in the Text. *Wherefore &c.*

THE Method, in which I propose to consider the Text, is this,

I. I will explain this Exhortation.

II. I will consider the Rules or Directions, laid down in the Context, as necessary to their obeying it.

III. I will illustrate the Argument by which it is enforc'd. And in the last place, I will make Application of all this to our present Circumstances.

THE Exhortation is delivered in these Words, *Wherefore receive ye one another.* By which he recommends to them, *First*, That laying aside all Shyness, Coldness and Reservedness, they would receive

receive one another into their Love, Esteem and Friendship ; and converse freely, and familiarly together, as became the Disciples of *Jesus Christ* : Their different Sentiments had (it would seem) occasioned some Shyness, and Distance, some secret Heart-burnings, and Alienation of Affections; and therefore the Apostle exhorts them, that laying these aside, they would love one another, and live friendly and familiarly together, as Fellow-christians, notwithstanding their different Sentiments and Practices.

THERE IS NO Duty more plainly enjoined in all the New Testament, than this, That Christians should live together in the most fervent Love, and sincerest Concord : Our Saviour gives it as his New and Dying Commandment to his Disciples, and makes it the Badge by which they were to be known-to belong to him, John xiii. 34, 35. *A new Commandment I give unto you that ye Love one another, as I have Loved you that ye also Love one another, by this shall all men know that ye are my Disciples if ye have Love one to another.* And in his Prayer for his Disciples before his Death, he makes earnest Request to his heavenly Father for their Unity, which is to be understood not of the Apostles only, but of all Christians, John xvii. 20, 21. *Neither pray I for these alone, but for them also which shall believe in me through their Word, that they all may be one, as thou Father art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us, that the World may believe that thou hast sent me.* The Apostles of our Lord in their Epistles to the Churches recommend this Duty, in the most earnest Manner : This Apostle in 1 Cor. i. 10. *Now I beseech you Brethren by the Name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that*
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there be no Divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joyned together in the same Mind, and in the same Judgment; and Phil. ii. 1, 2. If there be therefore any Consolation in Christ, if any Comfort of Love, if any Fellowship of the Spirit, if any Bowels and Mercies; fulfil ye my Joy, that ye be like minded having the same Love being of one Accord of one Mind: The Apostle Peter, 1 Ep. i. 22. Seeing ye have purified your Souls in obeying the Truth through the Spirit, unto unfeigned Love of the Brethren; see that ye love one another with a pure Heart fervently. And the Apostle John almost throughout his first general Epistle, as iii. 11. For this is the Message that ye heard from the Beginning, that we should love one another. Again, iv. 7, 8. Beloved let us love one another, for Love is of God: And every one that loveth, is born of God, and knoweth God: He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is Love. And again, v. 1. Every one that loveth him that begat, loveth him also that is begotten of him. These are but a few of the Texts, which are to be found in the new Testament to this Purpose, and certainly none who have ever read it, will pretend that Christians are allowed to hate, or so much as to be cold, and indifferent to one another. To this most necessary Duty, the Apostle in the Text, exhorts the Christians, to whom he writes.

Secondly, He exhorts them to it with this View, that they might live in Communion together, that is, that they might joyn together in the Worship of God, and in the Ordinances, and Institutions of the Christian Religion. That the Exhortation was given with this View, is plain from his Prayer in the preceeding Verse, that ye may with one Mind, and one Mouth glorifie God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, and then it follows, wherefore
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receive ye one another, that is, into your Love and Friendship, that ye may joyn together in glorifying God. It does not appear with any Certainty, from any thing in this Epistle, that they had separated Communion upon the Account of their Differences ; if they had, 'tis probable the Apostle would have told them more roundly of it : But this was an Event that was to be fear'd from that Shyness and Distance, that judging and despising one another which was among them. These things usually preceed an open Breach of Communion among Christians, and commonly end in it. To prevent their Differences coming to so great, and scandalous an Height, the Apostle gives them this Exhortation.

THAT it is the Will of Jesus Christ, that his Disciples should live together in Christian-communion, is plain, from the Ordinances he has appointed in his Church, which are to be Dispensed, and Celebrated in the Christian Assemblies : From the Exhortations given them, *not to forsake the Assembling themselves together*, and *to Exhort one another*. From the Church, or Body of Christians being compared to the Natural Body, and particular Christians with their several different Gifts and Abilities, being compared to the several Members of the Body, which all have their proper Usefulness, designed for the Advantage of one another, and of the whole Body. This comparison the Apostle makes and illustrates, 1 Cor. xii. 12, &c. And from its being a native and necessary Effect of that fervent Love, which Christians, as I have already proved, ought to have for one another. Can we pretend that we Love our Fellow-christians as we ought, and yet won't joyn with them in the Worship of
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GOD, nor partake of the Gospel-institutions with them, as we have Opportunity ; tho' no Terms of Communion are required of us, which we cannot in Conscience agree to? Can we pretend that we own them as Members of the Body of Christ, his Church, and yet they shall have no Benefit of any Gifts and Graces GOD has bestowed on us, nor will we receive any Benefit by the Gifts GOD has bestowed on them? This is as Unnatural and Absurd, as if the Eye should say to the Hand, *I have no need of thee*, or the Head to the Feet, *I have no need of you* : as the Apostle argues in the place last Cited. Such Love is of the same sort with that the Apostle James speaks of, ii. 15. *If a Brother or Sister be naked, and destitute of daily Food, and one of you say unto them, depart in Peace, be you Warmed, and Filled : notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the Body : What doth it profit ?* It's a sort of Love which the Apostle John dissuades us from, I Epist. iii. 18. *My little Children let us not Love in Word, neither in Tongue, but in Deed and in Truth.*

AGREEABLE to what I have been proving to be the Duty of Christians, was the Practice of the first Christians, for which they are commended, Acts ii. 42. *They continued stedfastly in the Apostles Doctrine and Fellowship, and in breaking of Bread, and in Prayer.* As those Primitive Christians joyned together in the Institutions of our Religion, ought not Christians to do so still? should there be any Difference between the Practice of Christians now, and their Practice, but what is occasioned by Numbers, and the distance of Place? All the Difference that this necessarily occasions, is, That when Christians are grown
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very Numerous, they cannot statedly meet together for the Worship of GOD, but must needs, for their conveniency divide themselves into several Worshipping Assemblies or Churches: And when the Christian Religion spread itself into distant Places of the World, this made it impossible for all Christians to joyn together in stated Communion; but neither the one nor the other hinders, but that they may joyn together in Communion, *as God in his Providence gives Opportunity.* Accordingly such, we find, was the Practice of the Primitive Christians, when they grew more Numerous, and Christianity had spread itself farther in the World; when they went from one place to another they joyned the Churches they met with, in their Travels, thus the Apostle Paul, after his Conversion, upon his coming to *Jerusalem*, essayed to joyn himself to the Church there, and upon *Barnabas's* Recommendation, was Received, *Acts ix: 26, 27.* and one *Phebe* a Member, and Servant of the Church at *Cenchrea* having some Business that call'd her to *Rome*, the Apostle in this Epistle Recommends her to that Church, *that they receive her as becometh Saints, xvi. 1, 2.* As he does *Timothy* also, to the Church of *Corinth*, *I Cor. xvi. 10.*

WHAT I have been proving to be a Christian duty, must be acknowledged to be such, by all who will not maintain, that this Practice of the Primitive Christians, either is not recorded to their Commendation, or though it is, yet we are not obliged to Imitate it: That, though all Christians are Members of the same Mystical Body, yet they are not obliged to be Useful to one another as they have Opportunity, and to endeavour every one in his Station, the Advantage of the whole,

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but may confine their Usefulness, to any Number of their Fellow-christians they shall see fit, and neither allow others to receive any Benefit by any Gifts and Abilities, GOD has bestowed on them, nor seek any Benefit themselves by the Gifts bestowed on others, or, so much as allow those others, were they ever so willing, to be Useful or Serviceable to them in the Gospel-ordinances. That the Gospel-institutions were not designed for the Common Benefit, and Comfort of Christians ; or though they were thus design'd, and particularly the partaking of the Lord's-supper was intended to be a Sign that we own ourselves one Body with all our Fellow-christians throughout the World, yet we may refuse to partake of that one Bread with them, or to let them partake of it with us, by which nevertheless, this our Union with them is signify'd ; and all this, though no Terms of Communion, which we cannot in Conscience agree to, are required of us. And Lastly, That this is very consistent with that fervent Love which Christians ought to have for one another, and by which they are to be known and distinguished as the Disciples of Christ. I have now finished what I had to offer under the first general Head.

THE Apostle's Exhortation amounts, I think, to this ; *by all that I have said to you, dear Brethren, upon this Subject, be persuaded, notwithstanding your different Opinions and Practices, to lay aside all Coldness, and Distance, and to receive one another into your sincerest Friendship and Love, that so ye may with one Mind and one Mouth glorify GOD, and have Communion in all the Ordinances of the Gospel, to your mutual Edification and Comfort.*

I COME now in the II. place, to consider the
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the Rules or Directions laid down in the Context, as necessary to their performing this Duty. It would be thought a hard task, now a-days, to lay down Rules sufficient to Unite, and Cement, to Preserve, or Restore *Love* and *Communion* among Christians, who had such different Sentiments, and Practices, as those Christians at *Rome* had; yet the Apostle, by two easy and plain Rules, which he lays down in the preceeding Chapter and this, and enforceth with the strongest Arguments, fully answers this end. The first of them is this, That they should make no Distinction, nor judge, or despise one another, on account of their different Sentiments and Practices. This Rule is laid down, *Rom. xiv. 1, 3.* In the *ist*, he delivers it thus, *Him that is Weak in the Faith, receive ye, but not to doubtful Disputations.* It is addressed to the Strong, or those that were in the Right, because the Weak, or those who were Mistaken in their Sentiments, could not be supposed to have a Right to Exclude the Strong from their Communion, upon the account of their being in the Right. The Apostle was determined, before he ended his Epistle, to tell, on which side of the Questions, debated among them, Truth lay, but that those who were to have an Apostolical Decision in their Favour, might not think themselves at Liberty to reject the Weak, he addresseth this Rule to them, *but not to doubtful Disputations.* That is, Make no Difference, or do not Discriminate them, on the account of their Sentiments, as some understand the Words, or raise no Strife nor Dispute about them, as others. The Apostle certainly does not mean that the Strong might not calmly Reason with the Weak so far as would serve the Cause of Truth, and

Charity ; for what Harm could there be in their Charitable Endeavours to increase Christian Knowledge in their Brethren ; if they convinced them, they were cured of their Weakness, and were become Stronger christians. But what he forbids, is, Their making these Differences matter of Contention and Strife. 'Tis plain, this Rule concerned the Weak, as well as the Strong, they were not to make a Distinction, nor separate from their Brethren, on account of their different Sentiments, no more than they from them, though for the Reason already given, it was more proper to address it to the Strong ; for thus the Apostle enlarges upon it, ver. 3. *Let not him that Eateth, Despise him that Eateth not ; and let not him that Eateth not, Judge him that Eateth ; for GOD hath received him.* Where it is observable the Apostle accommodates his Direction to the different Tempers of the Strong and Weak ; the Strong, or those that are more Knowing, are apt to Despise the Weak as Ignorant, Narrow minded, or Superstitious Men : And therefore the Apostle thus Addresseth himself to them, *Let not him that Eateth, Despise him that Eateth not.* On the other hand, the Weak are apt to entertain Harsh Thoughts of the Strong, and rashly to Judge them Irreligious, or Prophane, and out of the Favour of GOD ; therefore he bespeaks them thus, *Let not him which Eateth not, Judge him that Eateth :* And addeth this Reason, *For GOD hath Received him.* It's plain, from the whole of the Apostle's Reasoning, that GOD had Received both the one and the other into his Family, but he says that GOD had received the Strong, or *Gentile Convert* ; because the *Jewish-Convert* was apt to Judge him as not of GOD's Family, for his not complying with

with what the *Jewish* Christian thought himself obliged to. Whereas the *Gentile* Convert, though he might Despise the other as Weak and Ignorant, yet was not so apt to go to that degree of Uncharitableness as to Judge him with respect to the Favour of GOD, but might think him a Well-meaning Man, and a sincere Christian notwithstanding.

THE Rule here laid down is the same, that is elsewhere recommended under the Name of Forbearance, and Charity, as *Eph. iv. 1, 2. I, therefore the Prisoner of the Lord, beseech you, that ye walk worthy of the Vocation wherewith ye are called, with all Lowliness and Meekness, with Long-suffering, forbearing one another in Love. Phil. ii. 1, 2. If there be therefore any Consolation in Christ, if any Comfort of Love, if any Fellowship of the Spirit, if any Bowels and Mercies, fulfil ye my Joy, that ye be Like-minded, having the same Love, being of one Accord, of one Mind, and Col. iii. 13, 14. forbearing one another and forgiving one another, if any Man have a Quarrel against any; even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye. And above all these things, put on Charity, which is the Bond of Perfection.*

THE Argument by which the Apostle enforceth this Rule, is in the 4th verse, *Who art thou that judgest another Mans Servant, to his own Master he standeth, or falleth, &c.* As if he had said, dare any of you take upon you to judge a Servant of Jesus Christ conducting himself by the Light of his Conscience, and sincerely endeavouring to approve himself to his Lord and Master whether he will be accepted or no? Who gave you Authority to judge him? that is to invade Christ's Prerogative; he is to stand or fall to his own Master, 'tis he alone
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can determine whether he will own him as of his Family, or no.

By this Expression, *another's Servant*, the Apostle distinguisheth a Christian, who is sincerely endeavouring, to the best of his Knowledge, to please, and to be accepted of God, from a Christian violating the plain Laws of the Gospel, acknowledged and receiv'd as such by himself; such a Person cannot be said to be serving his Master, when he is wilfully transgressing his Laws, but the other is properly said to be his Servant, because he is doing that which he thinks pleasing to him, and agreeable to his Laws. It is one thing to judge such a wilful Offender unworthy of the Tokens of Christian Communion, and out of the Favour of God, while he continues such; because God has already pass'd that Judgment on him, in his Word. And quite another thing thus to judge one that is endeavouring to keep a good Conscience, and to please his Lord and Master, because God hath pass'd no such Judgment upon such a Person. The Apostle gives the Reason why he useth this Phrase, in the following verse, *He that regardeth the Day, regardeth it to the Lord; and he that regardeth not the Day, to the Lord he doth not regard it, &c.* As if he had said, I count you the Servants of another Master in these things, because ye are sincerely endeavouring, in your different Practices, to be accepted of God. This the Apostle lays down as a sufficient Reason why they should not judge or despise one another, but at the same time he takes Occasion from it to put them upon examining and judging themselves, *v. 7. for none of us liveth to himself, and no Man dieth to himself, &c.* As if he had said, none of you, I hope, do, or omit these things, out of Humour,
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or Peevishness, or Opposition to one another; ye know none of us ought to live to himself, as if he were his own Master, and none of us dieth to himself so as not to be accountable for his Actions, let us remember, that living and dying we are the Lord's; for, *for this End he died, rose and revived*, that he might be our Lord and Lawgiver when living, and our Judge and Rewarder after Death. But as he improves this Argument to put them upon examining themselves whether they do, or omit these things, with a View to God and to Christ; so at the same time he infers from it, that they ought not to despise, or judge one another, *v. 10. but why dost thou judge thy Brother? or why dost thou set at Nought thy Brother? for we shall all stand before the Judgment-seat of Christ.* Thus I have considered the first Rule laid down in the Context, and the Argument enforcing it. The whole, I think, amounts to this, that sincere Christians, though some of them are weaker, and some stronger, ought to receive one another, without making any Distinction about those Matters, wherein they may differ; or making those things Matter of Dispute and Contention, and particularly, the strong, though in the Right, ought to deal thus with the weak, though in the Wrong, or under a Mistake; that they ought not to judge, or despise one another for those things in which each Party is conscientiously designing to approve themselves to God, that to do so, is to invade the Prerogative of God, and of Christ. The contradictory Proposition which every one must maintain, who finds Fault with this Rule, and the Argument upon which it is built, are these, that sincere Christians of whom some are stronger, some weaker ought not to receive one another: That they

they may make a Distinction upon the Account of those Matters wherein they may differ, may make them Matter of Dispute and Contention. And particularly, the strong, or those who think themselves so, may thus deal with the weak, or those whom they may think mistaken, or in an Error : That Christians may judge and despise one another, on Account of those things in which each Party is conscientiously endeavouring to approve themselves to God, though he be our Master, to whom we must stand, or fall : That this is not to invade the Prerogative of GOD, and of Christ ; or though it is, yet it is lawful : Which Propositions, how agreeable they are to the Spirit of the Gospel, to those Texts of Scripture I have quoted, and particularly to the Apostle's Reasoning which I have been now considering ; and how well calculated to promote Peace and Love among Christians in this imperfect State, every one may judge.

THE 2d Rule laid down by the Apostle in the Context, is this, *that no Man put a stumbling Block, or Occasion to fall in his Brothers Way, v. 13.* that is, that no man should do any indifferent thing, let him be ever so much perswaded of its Indifferency, or being in itself lawful, which, he knows before hand, or has Reason to believe, will be an Occasion to lead another to do the same thing, either against his Conscience, or with a doubting Conscience. The former Rule was chiefly applyed to the Weak, against whose uncharitable judging their Brethren, the Apostle's Argument bears with the greatest Force ; this principally relates to the Strong : And thus he applies it in the following verses. He determines on what Side in their Debates, Truth lay ; and yet at the same time ex-
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horts them, who had Truth on their Side, as to the Matters in Debate among them, not to give Offence to their weak Brethren, by an Imprudent Use of their Liberty, that is, not to tempt the *Jewish* Christian to do the like, while his Scruples remained. The Arguments enforcing this Rule are, *1st*, That however lawful the thing may be in itself, yet it is a Sin for any Person to do it, who but doubts of its Lawfulness; and therefore for any Person, so much as by his Example, to tempt another to do a thing with a doubting Conscience, is to endanger his Soul, which yet was so dear in Christ's Sight, that he laid down his Life to redeem it. *2dly*, That we should not think it much to abridge ourselves in the Use of things that we think lawful, for the Essence of the Christian Religion, or the great Privileges and Advantages of it, do not consist in them; and therefore we should not contend for them with the like Zeal, as we would for the Essentials of Religion. *3dly*, The Example of Christ, whose Life here upon Earth, was spent, not in indulging himself, but in humble Condescension to the Weaknesses, and even suffering the Reproaches of Men: And therefore his Disciples should not spend their Lives in pleasing themselves, but in pleasing their Brethren to their Edification. The attentive Reader will easily perceive these Arguments insisted on from the *15th v. of the preceeding Chapter, to the 4th v. of this Chapter.* We have the same Rule given to the Church of Corinth, *1 Cor. 8. 9. &c.*

THIS Rule has a plain Tendency to preserve, and promote Peace, and Concord; such Tenderness in Christians towards one another, would prevent a great many Disputes, and cannot but be very endearing, and contribute to the Increase
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of mutual Love. Every one must approve of this Rule, who does not maintain, that Christians need not, or ought not, to abstain from things which they judge only Lawful, though by the Use of them, they tempt their weaker Brethren to sin against their Consciences ; though thereby they should destroy the Workmanship of God, and one for whom Christ died ; which is contrary, not to the Christian Religion only, but even to common Humanity itself. These are the Rules, which the Apostle thought necessary, and sufficient for the Restoring, and maintaining Love and Communion among those Christians.

Thirdly, The Argument by which the Exhortation in the Text is enforced, is the next thing to be considered. It is delivered in these Words, *as Christ hath also received us to the Glory of God.* That is, Receive one another into Love and Communion, even as Christ hath received you both into his Church, that ye may joyn together in glorifying God. The following Verses prove this to be the Sense of the Words ; for thus the Apostle makes good his Argument ; Christ hath received the *Jewish* Christians into his Family, *for he was the Minister of the Circumcision, &c. v. 8.* And therefore ye *Gentile* Christians, ought to make no Difficulty of receiving them into your Love and Communion; and ye *Jewish* Christians should make as little Difficulty of receiving the *Gentile* Christians, when ye consider that their Conversion is prophesied of, in several places of the Old Testament, that they are to be taken into the Church in the Days of the Messiah, to bear a Part with you in rendering Praise, and Glory, to God, for so great and extensive a Salvation, *v. 9, 10, 11, 12.*

THE Argument is plainly taken from the Example, and Authority of Christ ; as if the Apostle

tle had said, Where Christ has made no Distinction, ye ought to make none. He has received you, both *Jewish* and *Gentile* Christians, into his Church, that ye may joyn together in glorifying God, and therefore ye ought to live together as his Domesticks, and to joyn together in promoting that End for which he has received you into his Family. He who is our Lord and Lawgiver, has Power to receive, and to reject; but will any of his Disciples pretend to counteract his Orders, and reject whom he hath received? Will ye exclude out of his Family, or treat as if they did not belong to it, those, who have the same Right to all the Privileges of it, that ye yourselves have? Is this to act as his Disciples, and as those that own him as Master and Head of his own Family? He was faithful to him that appointed him as a Son over his own House, and will any of his Disciples pretend to be more faithful, and to mend, or alter what he has done, out of a Pretence of Zeal for his Glory?

THIS seems to me, to be the Strength of the Apostle's Argument; and all must acknowledge the Force of it, who will not maintain that the Example of Jesus Christ in this, is not obligatory upon Christians, but that they may make a Distinction, where he has made none; or that Christ has given them Authority to reject those, whom himself has received; and then such Authority should be plainly proved. Or that tho' they have no such Authority, yet they may treat their Fellow-christians as if they had. Or that Christ has not taken Care enough of his Church, but they may come after him and mend, or alter what he has done, when they think it more for his Glory. And that all this is very consistent with the Regard they ought to have for their Lord and Mas-

ter. But no Christian, I hope, will maintain any of these Propositions.

I have now finished what I had to offer for the Explication of this Text. The Application of all this to our present Circumstances, is, I think, very easie, and I'm sure, very necessary.

I MAY say of the Epistles which the Apostles wrote to the Churches, and particularly of this Portion of Scripture, I have been now considering, what the Apostle verse 4. says of the Writings of the Old Testament ; *whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our Learning.* We will all acknowledge that the Exhortations, and Directions given in them to the Churches, as far as they are fairly Applicable to our Case and Circumstances, are to be regarded by us, as much as they ought to have been, by the Christians to whom they were immediately Directed. Let us see then, how far this part of Scripture is Applicable to our Circumstances ; and, 1st, What hinders but that we should understand the Exhortation in the Text, as teaching us our Duty, as well as those to whom it was at first Directed ? Is it not the Duty of Christians now to Love one another, as much as it was in the Primitive times ? Ought not we to wear that Badge of our Discipleship as much as they ? Or is Shyness and Distance, Coldness and Indifferency among Christians, not to say, Hatred, Strife, and Division, more allowable now, than in the times of the Apostles ? And if the Duty of Love be not of a temporary, but perpetual Obligation, ought it not to Appear and Evidence itself by the same Effects ? Should we not Evidence the Sincerity and Fervency of it, by joyning together in the Worship of GOD, and in all Gospel-

pel-ordinances as we have Opportunity ? as the Primitive Christians were to Evidence, and did Evidence their Love to one another ? If we look upon one another as *Members of the same Body* ought we not to have a tender Care one of another, and be ready both to give and receive all the Assistance we can, for our Mutual comfort and Edification ? what Excuse can we have that will Justify our not living in Love and Communion ? There are different Sentiments, and Practices among us 'tis true ; but was it not so with those Christians to whom this Exhortation was given ? Nothing is plainer than *that Unity of Sentiments, and Uniformity in Practice, is not necessary to the Union of Christians*. If it had been necessary, the Apostle had here a fair Opportunity of telling it ; but so far is he from saying any such thing, that diversity in both is Acknowledged, and yet, that Diversity continuing, Unity, and Love, and their living together in Communion is press'd in the most earnest Manner : And in those other Texts I have already quoted, variety of Sentiments is supposed, and therefore Charity and Mutual-forbearance is made the bond of Union. There is one Text from which some have argued, as if an agreement in all Religious Sentiments were necessary to Christian Unity, it is 1 Cor. i. 10. *Now I beseech you Brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no Divisions among you, but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same Mind, and in the same Judgment*. But that Unity in all Religious Sentiments is not intended by this Exhortation, may be gathered from other Texts of Scripture which recommend Union among Christians upon the supposition of diversity of Sentiments ; we may safely

safely conclude that the Apostle would not at one time insist upon an agreement in all Religious Sentiments, as necessary to the Union of Christians, and at another time recommend Union upon quite another Scheme, as he plainly does in all those Texts where he exhorts to mutual Forbearance, and most evidently in my Text and Context; he himself tells us that those Christians had different Sentiments, and different Practices too, yet he recommends it to them to live in Love and Communion notwithstanding, and among the Rules he lays down as necessary for this end, you will not find an agreement of Sentiments, so much as spoken of; which proves undeniably, that such an agreement is not necessary to Christian Unity; and that the Apostle never imagined it was. The meaning of this Exhortation may be gathered from the occasion of his giving it, which was, that he was credibly Inform'd there were Divisions among them, and that they had rank'd themselves under different Leaders, *some saying, I am of Paul, and others, I am of Apollos*, and therefore, what the Apostle had in his view, was to Exhort them against Divisions, and this is plainly express'd in the Text itself, *that there be no Divisions among you, but that ye all speak the same thing*, not one of you saying, *I am of Paul*, and another, *I of Apollos*, and a third, *I of Cephas*, and a fourth, *I am of Christ*, but that ye all say, *I am of Christ*, and own him as your common Lord and Head, and that ye be perfectly joyned together in the same Mind, and in the same judgment, so as to own him, and no other besides him, as your Master and Head, and be united in Affection towards one another. This appears to me to be the true meaning of that Exhortation; but what meaning can we put upon it,

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upon the other supposition, but this, I Exhort you, that ye all speak the same thing, whether ye be Weak or Strong, Ignorant or more Knowing, however different your Capacities be, or your Diligence in seeking after Knowledge, whatever Difference of this kind, or any other, there may be among you ; yet I Exhort that your Sentiments be the same, your Knowledge equal, that the Weak know as much as the Strong, and the Ignorant, as the most Knowing. Ought such a Sense to be put upon the Apostle's Words, when they are fairly capable of another Meaning very consistent with all his other Exhortations to Peace, and Unity ? And should the Apostle be represented as putting the Unity of Christians, upon a Foot, on which it's morally Impossible they should Unite in this imperfect State ? There have been different Sentiments, and Practices among Christians, since the beginning of Christianity, and, it is to be expected from Mens different Capacities, Education, Application, and Opportunities, that there will be to the end of the World. Is it Reasonable to think that the Apostle, who was so Zealously concerned for the Unity of Christians, would put it on a Foot which would make it Impracticable ? I have said enough, I think, to prove, that an Agreement of Sentiments, or in Practice, is not necessary to the Unity of Christians.

WE may, indeed, aggravate our Differences, and, by drawing Consequences from one anothers Opinions, and charging them upon one another, though we do not see, and tho' we abhor such Consequences as are charged upon us, represent them as very Great and Momentous : And so might the Christians in *Rome* have done ; the *Gentiles* might have charged the *Jews* with a design
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to bring them under that Yoke of Bondage, which neither they nor their Fathers were able to bear, and as despising the Grace of the Gospel, and as saying, in effect, that Christ profited them nothing: And the *Jews* on the other hand, might have charged the *Gentiles* with denying the Authority of the Old Testament, and that they would break through the Restraints of the divine Law. But the Apostle sets their Differences in a juster Light, when he represents both Parties as sincerely endeavouring to be accepted of GOD; *he that regardeth a Day, regardeth it to the Lord: And he that regardeth not a Day, to the Lord he doth not regard it, &c.* And may not the same be justly said of our Differences? Are not both Parties endeavouring to keep a good Conscience, and to be accepted of our Lord and Master? GOD forbid, that any of us should think otherwise. And should not this Consideration weigh with us, and make us Embrace one another as Fellow-christians. The Apostle, you may observe, puts the Differences among the Christians to whom he writes, in the most *reconciling View* he could with Justice, which teacheth us our Duty, and that it is no *Christian Office* to aggravate and heighten Differences among Brethren. Let us look upon our Differences in the *View*, the Apostle has taught us to place them in; and our Spirits will Cool, and our Resentments fall.

BUT it may be said, shall we joyn with men in their Errors? that were to partake of other Men's Sins, and to shew too small a Regard for Truth. I answer, what does the Apostle here recommend? Does he not require the *Gentile* Christians, after he had told them they were in the Right, to receive the *Jewish* Christians, tho' in an Error? If by joyning with Men in their Er-

rors be meant, being obliged to embrace and profess their Errors ; this is quite out of the Scheme ; for the Apostle allowed neither the one, nor the other, to make the things wherein they differed, Terms of Communion for one another. All that is required, is that we receive our Fellow-christians, notwithstanding we may think them in an Error ; and should we think that a Hardship, who yet expect to be accepted of God notwithstanding many Errors, and Mistakes, which may cleave to us ? And the best and most knowing, have Reason to suspect they have many Errors, notwithstanding all their Knowledge. Should we insist upon harder Terms with our Brethren, of admitting them as Fellow-members of the Church of Christ, than we expect God will insist on with us, of admitting us into Heaven ? And can we think that our obeying a plain Law of Christ, in receiving whom he receives, will make us Partakers of other Men's Errors or Sins ? I have said enough to prove that the Apostle's Exhortation reacheth us, and is applicable to our Circumstances, and therefore, *Dear Brethren, let us be exhorted to lay aside all Shyness and Distance, and to receive one another into our sincerest Love and Friendship, and to joyn together, as we have Opportunity, in the Worship of God, and in all the Institutions of our Religion, to our mutual Edification and Comfort.*

IN the 2d place, if this Exhortation teach us our Duty, it is necessary in Order to our performing it, that we observe the Rules which the Apostle here lays down. Let us therefore receive one another without making a Difference upon the Account of our different Sentiments, or making them Matter of Dispute and Contention ; if we can, by calm and fair Reasoning, either of us,

convince the other, let us do it in the Spirit of Meekness ; but if we find that we cannot reason together upon these Subjects, with that Calmness and Meekness which becometh Christians, and that our Attempts this way, have rather cooled, than increased Charity, let us let it alone, till, through the Increase of Love among us, we are more able to bear it.

WE have not an Apostle Infallibly to decide, upon which Side, in our present Debates, Truth lies ; but are to determine the best we can, every one of us for himself, by a careful Study of the Holy Scriptures : And doubtless every one of us thinks himself the strong, or in the Right in these Matters, and those who differ from us, so far weak, or in an Error ; and if even they, who had an Apostle's Determination in their Favour, might not insist upon their Brethren's agreeing to their Sentiments as a Term of Communion, much less ought we, who cannot pretend to the like Certainty, impose our Sentiments on our Brethren, who **are** much perswaded, that they are in the Right, as we can be, that we are. Let us have Compassion then, one of another, and not urge our Brethren farther than their Consciences and Conviction will allow ; in so doing we will imitate our Blessed Saviour, of whom it was prophesied, *Isa. xlii. 3. A bruised Reed shall he not break, and the smoking Flax shall he not quench.* And who fulfilled that Prophecy when here upon Earth, treating the weak, not with Rigour and Severity, but with Mercy and Gentleness : And we will imitate the Example of God, *Ezek. xxxiv. 16. I will seek that which was lost, and bring again that which was driven away, and will bind up that which was broken, and will strengthen that which was weak.*
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And the Example of the Primitive Christians, who received those that were weak, and had attained but to a small Degree of Knowledge of the Christian Religion, and by instructing them in Meekness and Love, strengthened them, and increased their Knowledge ; of which we have Instances in the xviii, and xix Chapters of the *Acts of the Apostles*.

AND let us not judge or despise one another, we are, all of us, the Servants of another Master, even Jesus Christ, and we must all of us appear before his awful Tribunal, who is every way qualified to be our Judge. We are endeavouring to approve ourselves to him, even in these things wherein we differ from one another, and to our own Master we must stand or fall. It's dangerous to despise one that belongs to Christ, though we may think him weak, and mistaken ; let us be thankful for what Measure of Knowledge we have, and humble under the Sense of our remaining Ignorance, and Weakness, but let us not despise those who have less Knowledge, or whom we may think to have less.

OUR Lord has expressly told us, that every Contempt, Indignity, or Neglect, which we are guilty of towards any of his Disciples, he will interpret and punish, as if done against himself, as well as reward every kind and good Office done them, as if it had been done to himself, *Matth. xxv. 35, &c.* And if it be dangerous so much as to despise one of Christ's Disciples, it must be more so, to judge him as out of the Favour of GOD, or as unworthy to be received as our Fellow-disciple. In the Heat of Contention, People are too apt to judge rashly of their Brethren ; but we should beware of it, 'tis invading the Prerogative of Christ ; Who art thou that judgest his Ser-

vant ? I hope none of us will allow ourselves in rash judging of our Brethren ; every one of us that will *live Soberly, Righteously, and Godly*, in the World, will be accepted of GOD, notwithstanding of our different Sentiments and Practices, as to other things ; and this, I hope, all of us are sincerely endeavouring to do. This is the best Proof we can give, that we love our Lord Jesus Christ in Sincerity, and have we not Reason to believe, and hope this of one another ? I would recommend to your serious Consideration these Words of our Saviour, *Matth. xviii. 6. And whoso shall receive one such little Child in my name, receiveth me. But whoso shall offend, that is, despise or discourage, reject, persecute, or seduce, one of these little ones, which believe in me, it were better for him that a Millstone were hanged about his Neck, and that he were drowned in the Depth of the Sea. And Matth. vii. 1, 2, 3. Judge not, that ye be not judged, for with what Judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged, and with what Measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again. And why beholdest thou the Mote that is in thy Brothers Eye, but considerest not the Beam that is in thine own Eye ?* There is a near Union between Christ and his Disciples, and he has a very tender Love for them, and will certainly plead their Cause, and take up their Quarrel.

BUT, though we ought not to judge one another, let every one examine and judge himself, from what Principle he acts, and for what End, let us take Care that it be not from Pride, or Passion, a peevish Humour, or a Spirit of Contention. We ought not to judge one another, with respect to these things, because we cannot enter into the Hearts of others, nor know the Springs of Action ; but it's very necessary that we judge our-

ourselves. We all profess to be sincerely endeavouring to be accepted of Christ our Lord and Master, let us take Care that it be so ; we know that we are not to live to please ourselves, but him, and, that when we die, we are accountable to him ; we believe *that he died, rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the Dead and Living.* Let us always bear this in Mind, and live as it becomes such, let us obey the Apostle's Exhortation, *Phil. 2. 3. Let nothing be done through Strife or Vain glory, but in Lowliness of Mind let each esteem other better than themselves.* This too has a great Tendency to unite us, and compose our Differences.

It is necessary likewise that we observe the 2d. Rule here laid down, *let us judge this that no man put a Stumbling-block, or Occasion to fall in his Brothers way.* Let us show becoming Tenderness, and Compassion towards one another, and abstain from those things we think Lawful, or Indifferent, rather than by our Example, tempt others to do them, who have scruples as to the Lawfulness of them ; far less let us require, and urge them to do things full against their Conscience, though we may think them Lawful, and Expedient. However lawful a thing may be in itself, yet 'tis a sin to that Man to do it, who is not convinced of its Lawfulness. Our being in the Right, or having Truth on our side, as to our Sentiments of those Matters, gives us no right to require our Brother to believe, as we believe, or do as we do ; the *Gentile* Convert was declared, by the Apostle to be in the Right, and yet he had not thereby a Right to require the *Jewish* Convert to be of the same Sentiments, nor to conform to his Practice ; so far from it, that he was to abstain from what was in itself Lawful, rather than Offend, or tempt
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the Jewish Christian to sin against his Conscience.

To urge things that we think Lawful, upon our Brethren who scruple the Lawfulness of them, as the terms of Peace, and Communion, is the certain way to break Peace, or endanger their Souls; it breaks Peace and Communion with all who chuse to obey GOD rather than Man; or if our Brethren should be tempted to comply rather than break the Churches Peace, it endangers their Souls, *for whatsoever is not of Faith, is Sin, and he that doubteth is condemned if he Eat.* Let us then abstain even from things we think Lawful, rather than, by doing them, lay any Temptation in our Brother's way: And let us not make Ostentation of our Persuasion of the Lawfulness of those things but *have our Faith to ourselves before GOD*, so as to have the inward Satisfaction that what we do is Lawful, when we take care to do it in such circumstances, as not to lay a Stumbling-block in our Brother's way.

AND let the Worth of an Immortal Soul, and the consideration how dear it is to Christ, prevail with us to observe this Rule. Let us likewise consider that it is no hardship to abridge ourselves in those Matters, for the Essence of the Christian Religion does not consist in them, and therefore they, do not deserve so much Zeal as is commonly taken up about them. And let the example of Jesus Christ *who pleased not himself*, prevail with us not to please our own Humours, but *let every one please his Neighbour for his Good to Edification.* The Observation of those Rules would yet restore our Peace, and they are the *Terms*, upon which alone, Peace can be Desirable, and Lasting in any Church.

IN the 3^d. place, let us be prevailed with to obey this Exhortation, and to observe these Rules, from the Argument laid down in the Text. As we believe that Christ has received us, both the one Party, and the other into his Church, let us receive one another; let us make no Distinction where Christ has made none, as the end for which he has received us, is, that we may Glorify GOD, let us joyn together in answering that End. He is our Lord and Lawgiver, and therefore we are bound to submit to his Authority; how can we pretend to Love him, if we do not Receive whom he hath Received? *If any Man, saith the Apostle John, saith, he loveth GOD, and hateth his Brother, he is a Lyar, for if he love not his Brother whom he hath seen, how can he love GOD whom he hath not seen.* And how will we be able to answer it in the day of Judgment, when, our Saviour assures us, he will resent and punish every Indignity and Affront offered to his Disciples as if it had been offered to himself? How can we pretend to be his Disciples if we will neither be determined by his Authority, nor imitate his Example?

THE Force of all this Reasoning is, indeed easily avoided, if we will venture to say of our Brethren that Christ has not received them. But upon what Foot, or by what Authority will we pronounce that Sentence; if Conformity to the Example and Obedience to the Laws of Jesus Christ, be the best Proof that we can possibly give that we belong to him; dare we say of our Brethren, that making allowance for human Weakness, they are not giving this Proof? I'm persuaded that on both sides we see those that differ from us in Opinion, of whose Interest

est in the Favour of GOD we have better Hopes, than of our own ; that is, we see Men of the other side of the Question more Holy and Humble, than we dare think our selves to be. Next, by what Authority will we pass such a Judgment ? Where has Christ said, that those of either side of the Questions in Debate among us, are out of his Favour, and do not belong to his Church ? If we can produce no Authority from him, it is very Arrogant, and Presumptuous in us to pass such a Judgment, and very Dangerous too, as I have already Prov'd.

THE Union of Christians is very much for the Honour of GOD, and of our Redeemer, our Saviour Prays for it, as a means to convince the World of the truth of his Religion, John xvii. 21. *That the World may believe that thou hast sent me.* And should not this prevail with us to live in Peace and Unity ? By this the Christian Religion gained Ground in the Primitive Times, when the Powers of this World were set against it, and it was every where spoken against. By the unnatural Divisions and Contentions among Christians now, it is losing Ground, even where it has the countenance and support of the Civil Magistrate, and is the Fashionable Religion. There are loud and just Complaints of the Growth of Deism, and there is no one thing, I believe, it is so much owing to, as the Strife and Divisions among Christians.

It is doubtless very unjust to charge the Faults of

of Christians upon their Religion which Breaths nothing but Peace and Love, Gentleness and Meekness; but this is the way that the World will judge of the Truth of our Religion, let us take away this Handle from them, as far as it is in our Power, of reproaching our holy Religion, and restore the Credit of it, by our Unity, as well as by the Holiness of our Lives.

THOSE whom Christ hath Received into his Church on Earth, if they continue Faithful to him, he will likewise receive into the Kingdom of Heaven, and ought Brethren to fall out by the Way, who have the same Hope of their Calling, and expect to live together in the most perfect Love for ever in Heaven.

THUS I have applied the several Heads of my Discourse to our present Case, and have, I think, plainly shewn that we are obliged to receive one another into Love and Communion, as well as those Christians were to whom this Epistle was directed, and that, consequently we are obliged to observe the same Rules; and that the Argument made use of in the Text ought to have the same Force with us, as with them. Now if all this be fully proved, then

First, Let all of us be humbled in the Sight of GOD, for the sinful Hand we have had in our Divisions. I do not design this as a Reproof to one Party only, all of us I suppose, upon a serious Review of our Conduct, will

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find Cause to blame ourselves for several things, it seldom happens that there are not Faults on both Sides, in such Cases ; let us confess our Faults and Follies to God, and humbly pray for Pardon.

LET us not call our Divisions by the sanctify'd Name of Zeal, and thereby cover the Evil of them from the Eyes of the World, and our own Eyes, there is so much of the Corruption of our Natures appears in them, that it's a Wonder any Body can place any Religion in them ; the Apostle attributes them to their true Cause, 1 Cor. iii. 3. *For whereas there is among you Envyng, and Strife, and Divisions, are ye not Carnal, and walk as Men ?*

Secondly, Let us in our several Stations endeavour to restore Peace and Love, and to strengthen what yet remains ; Let us (my Reverend Fathers, and Brethren) who are imploy'd in the Ministry of the Word, inculcate, and recommend this Duty, and let us do this by our Example, as well as by preaching. This is one thing wherein we ought to be Examples to the Believers, 1 Tim. iv. 12. *Be thou an Example of the Believers in Word, in Conversation, in Charity, in Faith, in Purity.*

AND you, my Brethren who are deputed from the several Churches, to joyn in our Assemblies of this Nature, to promote the Interest of Religion, be exhorted to practise and recommend this Duty, let us in such Assemblies as this, avoid all Strife and Contention, let us bear with one another in Love, and pursue the true End of our Association, the preserving
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and promoting of Peace, and true Religion, and Vertue.

AND you, my Christian Brethren, who are in the Station of private Christians, be exhorted to lay aside all Shyness and Distance, to receive one another, and live in Love and Communion, as becomes Christians: Let us imitate the Example, and pay a just Regard to the Authority of Jesus Christ, *in receiving one another, as Christ has received us to the Glory of GOD.* Now the GOD of Patience and Consolation, grant you to be like minded, one towards another according to Christ Jesus, that ye may with one Mind, and one Mouth glorifie GOD. Amen.

F I N I S.

E R R A T A.

P Age 4. l. 20. for Argument *read* Arguments.
 p. 15. l. 32. for Proposition *read* Propositions.
 p. 22. l. 14. *read* proves undeniably:

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